



P R A C T I C A L G U I D E T O

HOSPITALIST RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

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Foreword by John Nelson, MD, FACP

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Getting prepared

Editor's note: Please note that this book defines "recruiter" as a leader of the practice, hospital, and/or hospitalist program that he or she manages and who acts as an active agent to recruit and retain new hospitalists. The terms "hospitalist manager," "the practice," and "recruiter" are used interchangeably, except in noted cases when a recruiter is a member of a designated recruiting firm.

A hospitalist practice has decided to recruit a hospitalist (or perhaps several hospitalists). Before running to the computer to begin searching databases for potential hospitalist candidates, the person(s) responsible for recruitment must make sure the hospital is thoroughly prepared. They do not want to be fortunate enough to locate a great candidate only to lose him or her because they were not prepared to completely answer the candidate's questions and concerns. Here is a list of things the practice should do in order to be adequately prepared to recruit candidates:

- Define the scope of the practice in job descriptions
- Establish candidate parameters
- Establish the call schedule
- Determine compensation
- Assemble the interview team
- Prepare the employment agreement

Define the scope of the practice in job descriptions

Before recruiting the right candidate, you must know what you will ask him or her to do. Hospital by hospital, hospitalist jobs have broad variations in the scope of practice. For example, a hospital might have an active intensivist service, and the employed hospitalist may never need to intubate a patient or manage a ventilated patient. If the hospital is small and lacking in specialists, the hospitalist team may also serve as the intensivists. The required skills to succeed in these two jobs are very different and should be reflected in the job description materials.

Correct job descriptions are crucial, not only to set appropriate expectations for the candidate, but to ensure patient safety and overall hospital effectiveness. One Midwest community hospital recently launched a hospitalist program and recruited three well-qualified candidates. Upon their arrival, the hospital adjusted their job responsibilities to provide coverage for a new wound care center and hyperbaric chamber. Unfortunately, none of the three hospitalists came to their new positions trained, experienced, or even

interested in wound care. Regardless, the three new hospitalists graciously agreed to train for the required certification. Within a matter of months, all three had given their notice of resignation. Both the program's hospitalist service and the wound care center took a huge step backward. The hospital in this example could have saved months of recruiting and training if it presented an accurate description of job duties to the hospitalist candidates.

Make sure to thoroughly define the scope of the hospitalist service prior to launching the recruitment effort by setting clear goals and responsibilities in job descriptions tailored to your particular hospital. See Figure 1.1 for a sample job description.

Figure 1.1: Job description

CLIENT LOCATION:

POSITION TITLE: Hospitalist

DATE:

JOB SUMMARY

The hospitalist provides inpatient clinical care to the patients referred to the hospitalist services. This care is delivered in close coordination with the nurse director and hospital departments to ensure high quality, effective patient care; timely hospital discharge; and excellent communication with PCPs, patients and families, specialists, hospital departments, and administration. The hospitalist leads the hospital interdisciplinary team to improve efficiency and facilitate continuum of care for patients from admission through the discharge process. This continuum of care includes general adult medicine, internal medicine consults as requested, critical care management, and management of patients with comorbidities.

PRIMARY JOB DUTIES

1. Demonstrates, by action and attitude, the general performance standards, treating each patient and referring physician as a cherished customer.
2. Develops and nurtures positive and productive working relationships with the nurse director, promoting a culture of teamwork and camaraderie.
3. Conducts daily hospital rounds on all patients referred to the service.
4. Provides patient care in a manner consistent with hospital medical staff by-laws, LOS standards, pathways/best practices, and referring physician requests.
5. Communicates daily with families, referring physicians, specialists, administration, and hospital departments in the care and treatment of patients referred to the service.

Figure 1.1: Job description (cont.)

6. Works with the nurse director to initiate and coordinate early discharge through collaboration with specialists, nursing staff, social services, utilization management, and other members of the interdisciplinary team.
7. Develops and maintains good working relationships with hospital departments and hospital administration.
8. Demonstrates a commitment to service by providing distinctive, personalized care and services by listening, anticipating, and responding to the needs of both internal (coworkers, fellow employees, etc.) and external (patients, family members, referring physicians/specialists, hospital staff, etc.) customers and striving to exceed customer expectations.
9. Contributes to hospital quality improvement activities by actively participating in the medical staff activities, participating and serving on various hospital committees as requested by hospital (pharmacy, patient care coordination, patient safety), and by making suggestions for improvement in processes and supporting change efforts in the hospitalist program.
10. Participates in the business development and marketing process as requested by hospital and/or nurse director.
11. Serves as a liaison to other physicians, business office, and administration to maximize communication and increase knowledge of the hospitalist program benefits.
12. Assumes responsibility for professional practice and personal growth.
13. Attends and completes all specific competencies and annual organizational requirements.

Figure 1.1: Job description (cont.)

14. Collaborates with the interdisciplinary team to discuss patients' progress, variances, and achievement of expected outcomes and plan of care.
15. Assumes responsibility to ensure that all necessary documentation is accurate, complete, and timely, including medical records, billing/coding, and any other such documentation as requested by hospital from time to time.

JOB SPECIFICATIONS

EDUCATION: Board certified or board eligible in internal medicine, may have subspecialty training as well.

LICENSURE: _____ medical license and all licenses required to practice medicine in the state of _____ and consistent with the medical staff by-laws of hospital.

EXPERIENCE: Completion of three-year internal medicine residency minimally. May have internal medicine primary care or hospitalist experience. Recent inpatient experience preferred.

ESSENTIAL TECHNICAL/MOTOR SKILLS: Excellent fund of knowledge with respect to the practice of medicine. Ability to speak clearly to communicate with patients, families, physicians, agencies, and staff regarding patient care.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS: Ability to develop positive interaction with patients, families, physicians, administrators, and coworkers in order to effectively care for the patient. Ability to develop positive relationships with referring physicians or potential referring physicians.

OTHER: Operate effectively in a self-directed manner to achieve stated results and goals.

Source: Inpatient Management, Inc., St. Louis, MO.

Establish candidate parameters

Based upon the scope of the practice, determine what training and clinical skills candidates will need to be successful in the hospitalist program. Do they need leadership experience? Do they need specific communication skills? Do they need to be proficient in any specific procedures?

The general rule is to recognize the right candidates, and not invest too much time or resources in candidates that do not fit. That being said, hospitals can also benefit from making those parameters as broad and as flexible as possible.

One Texas-border community hospital really wanted its hospitalists to be bilingual because many patients spoke Spanish, so the hospital made the skill a job requirement. Upon further investigation into this community hospital, most of the existing nurses were bilingual and served as available interpreters, thus negating the language requirement in a hospitalist. This hospital hired a hospitalist who did not speak any Spanish, and he did surprisingly well. He learned Spanish during his first two years and can now communicate very well with all of his patients. During his fifth year, he was named physician of the year at this hospital. Was this candidate a perfect fit? No. Was he a good hire? Absolutely!

Do not discount candidates who might lack one of your desired skills if you are willing to invest the time into training them. Cast a wide net to get as many candidates as possible.

Establish the call schedule

One of the first questions a candidate is likely to ask is, “What will my schedule be?” It is important to define and articulate how the schedule will work even before speaking with the first candidate. If you are recruiting for an existing practice, you will need to consider

Chapter 1

how the addition of another physician will alter the existing schedule, as discussed with various scheduling models in Chapter 4.

Determine compensation

Candidates will want to understand the compensation plan in its entirety, as pay is likely another first question from the candidate. It is important to create a budget before beginning the search. This budget should contain all the elements of the physician compensation plan (salary, bonus, benefits, etc.) and assign a dollar value to each. Compensation plans are discussed in the next chapter.

Assemble the interview team

Designing an interview for a high-performance recruiting operation is not easy, yet it is critically important. Your interview team should be carefully selected and well versed in the recruiting process. Chapter 7 discusses this important element in detail.

Prepare the employment agreement

It is imperative to have an employment agreement prepared prior to launching recruiting efforts. This will help prepare the interviewer to answer any questions that the candidates might ask about the agreement. The hospital should arrange and budget for a lawyer familiar with physician employment contracts to prepare the agreement. We will discuss some of the important elements of this agreement in Chapter 5.

Over the past 10 to 12 years of the hospitalist movement, many hospitals made the critical mistake of finding a physician who was interested in hospital medicine and simply assigning unassigned patients to the doctor. And with no more planning than that, it was called a hospitalist program. When it came time to recruit an additional hospitalist, the

hospital was grossly unprepared. Preparation does not need to (and should not) take a long time. However, taking these important preparation steps can launch the hospitalist recruitment plan into a successful search . . .

The actual recruitment time from the point of completing all the preparations will vary greatly depending upon the size and location of the community. In larger cities with access to internal medicine training programs, it is possible to recruit a well-qualified hospitalist in a few months. In a more rural setting, a year or more of searching is not uncommon. Thorough preparation should greatly reduce missteps and possibly shorten recruiting time.



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